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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SHENYANG 000216

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/CM, EAP/K, PRM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10 YEARS AFTER KOREAN UNIFICATION

TAGS: PREF PREL PINR KWMN KN KS CH SPILL

SUBJECT: PYONGYANG UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

VIEWS APRIL 2008 OPENING

REF: (A) SHENYANG 115 (B) SHENYANG 79 (C) 06 SHENYANG  
74 (D) 06 SEOUL 1519

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL STEPHEN B. WICKMAN. REASONS: 1.4(b)/(d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Yanbian University of Science and Technology (YUST) President and Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST) founding President Dr. Kim Chin Kyong, PUST Executive Vice President David Kim, and YUST Director Norma Nichols provided updates on PUST construction progress and its planned opening date in several late-October, early November 2007 meetings with CG and Conoffs, in Yanji and most recently, in Shenyang. President Kim also discussed his assistance to orphanages in North Korea, his support for North Korean refugees in China, and his efforts to help North Korean refugees willing to repatriate. End Summary.

PUST planning to open for business in April 2008

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¶2. (C) Freshly returned from multiple trips to Pyongyang to inspect the final phase of construction of the PUST core campus buildings and to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il (Kim, Chong-il), PUST President Kim was eager to share news of his plans to formally open his Pyongyang campus in April 2008. According to Kim, construction of 14 PUST buildings, including the IT building, a student dormitory, guest house, cafeteria and the power-supply building would be complete by late-November 2007. Kim expressed full confidence that from early December 2007 to the anticipated opening of PUST in April 2008, North Korean technicians and construction workers could outfit existing campus facilities with the necessary equipment, the North Korean government would select North Korean students and local staffing for PUST, and Kim and his staff would finalize pro-bono contracts with international instructors and find financial support to cover operating expenses for the first semester and beyond.

¶3. (C) Dr. Kim presented a photo display of the various construction projects, which Econoff had a chance to look at more closely. Dr. Kim pointed out that, while the design of the buildings and grounds is modern enough, construction methods are quite primitive, and all of the labor is being done by North Korean soldiers. The photos indicated that manual equipment was being used to mix cement and to pave roads within the campus. The photo also showed a makeshift bakery that produces bread to feed the workers, whom Dr. Kim said were issued two large cakes of bread each day.

¶4. (C) While the photos indicated that the construction was moving along well, quality problems were readily visible. Windows, doors and walls were out of plumb and many floors appeared to slope randomly. Most scaffolding was constructed

using unfinished poles and rope. The only exception seemed to be the modern steel scaffolding being used in the construction of the monument outside the Administration Building's main entrance.

PUST Curriculum, Enrollment and Staffing

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¶ 15. (C) Dr. Kim told us that, while in the long-term PUST planned to evolve into a graduate and undergraduate institution, initially PUST would offer only graduate-level courses that, per Kim Jong-il's direction, must be taught exclusively in English. The programs of study available in April 2008 will be Business Administration, Agriculture, Food Engineering, Health (Nursing) and Architecture. Enrollment will be strictly limited to graduate-level North Korean students being groomed as future government leaders. Dr. Kim expected the ratio of international to local staff would be 1:1 and claimed that Kim Jong-il had agreed contractually that Dr. Kim could select whatever staff he wanted, granting the PUST President wide control over the lecture content along with other concessions, such as full internet access for all of PUST's North Korean students. In a late October meeting, however, Dr. Kim said Kim Jong-il had indicated that, while he and his inner circle were fully supportive of PUST, much of the DPRK government (namely, the military leadership) was very concerned about PUST and its strong South Korean bent. As such, Kim Jong-il reportedly asked Dr. Kim to make a concerted effort to recruit primarily Q&western, Q8 vice South Korean, staff.

¶ 16. (C) Mr. Gary Alan Spanovich, an urban planning consultant from Canby, Oregon, who is traveling with the group, told Econoff that the Portland-based Wholistic Peace Institute, of

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which he is Executive Director, would sponsor a Nobel Laureate Peace Chair at both YUST and PUST, as well as a similar Chair at the University of Portland. He said the Institute plans to have former South Korean President Kim Dae Jung arrive at PUST to participate in the opening ceremonies and then to be the first Nobel Peace Laureate in Residence, remaining at PUST for a period of four weeks. He said the Institute would host the former President Kim in Portland for the launch of his forthcoming book, just prior to his departure for North Korea. Spanovich said the Institute is also having talks with the Dalai Lama to have the Dalai Lama occupy the Chair at the University of Portland.

PUST funding woes

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¶ 17. (C) While Dr. Kim expressed little doubt that he could fulfill all of Kim Jong-il's requests, two close aides, Dr. David Kim and Norma Nichols, were less optimistic about meeting the letter all of the leader's demands. First, they expressed their doubts about the ability of North Korean students to follow English-only, graduate-level lectures and to produce graduate-level, English-language research papers. Second, while Kim and Nichols were both confident they could enlist a full staff of primarily western, vice South Korean, staff for at least the first semester, they said they would face serious staffing difficulties beginning in the second semester if they could not recruit in greater numbers from South Korea, where many academics were willing to teach at PUST for free but are not comfortable teaching in English. Finally, both Kim and Nichols were very concerned that, without charging any tuition, room and board, and without financial support from Pyongyang for the foreseeable future, PUST would soon find itself in major financial difficulty. In an aside, Nichols stressed that although President Kim was quick to highlight PUST's partnership with Rice University, that institution provided no financial support; PUST was therefore desperately looking for new University partnerships and ways to finance PUST's operations over the longer term.

Refugee assistance

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18. (C) President Kim also provided a thumbnail sketch of his efforts to provide assistance to approximately 23,000 orphans in the DPRK (mostly in the Naja-Sonbong or Nason area) and his ongoing support for elderly and infirm DPRK refugees in China. The latter, he said, were cared for by his wife in apartments in Yanji. He stated, however, that over the past seven years he focused his efforts almost exclusively on converting some 100-200 newly arrived refugees each month to Christianity and providing them financial support (usually RMB 800) if these refugees would return to North Korea. Opining that the RMB 800 amount was sufficient to feed a family of five for one year in North Korea, Kim added that, not only was the Yanji Public Security Bureau (YPSB) fully aware of his programs, both to assist infirm refugees and to repatriate the others, but the YPSB also posed no objections to either program and in fact appeared supportive. He speculated that one reason the Yanji authorities were so willing to tolerate his activities was because their children often attended YUST, which has a stellar placement record for its graduates.

Comment

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19. (C) As he has shown during past encounters over many years, Dr. Kim continues to be a disarming interlocutor whose deep convictions tend to color his direct personal experiences. (One measure of his idealism and naivete is that Dr. Kim's latest Shenyang visit was to promote a USD 500-million world trade center project in Shenyang) together with the World Trade Center Association of New York (Q) without knowing how much trade and investment occurred in Shenyang relative to the much more advanced Dalian.) He is nonetheless a compelling leader who, by his own admission, survived torture and interrogation in Pyongyang and, with Chinese help, convinced Kim Jong-Il to endorse the PUST project. Dr. Kim was coy about the number of meetings he has had with the North Korean leader, telling us at one point that his former captors threatened him with severe consequences if he told the outside world about his meetings with the dictator. He implied, however, that he sees Kim Jong-il almost every time he visits Pyongyang, including during the just-completed visits in November. He also repeated claims that Kim Jong-il suffers from a number of

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physical ailments; that the leader garners very little of the respect accorded to his father, Kim Il Song; and that it will therefore be extremely difficult if not impossible for Kim Jong-il to transfer power to his heirs.

WICKMAN